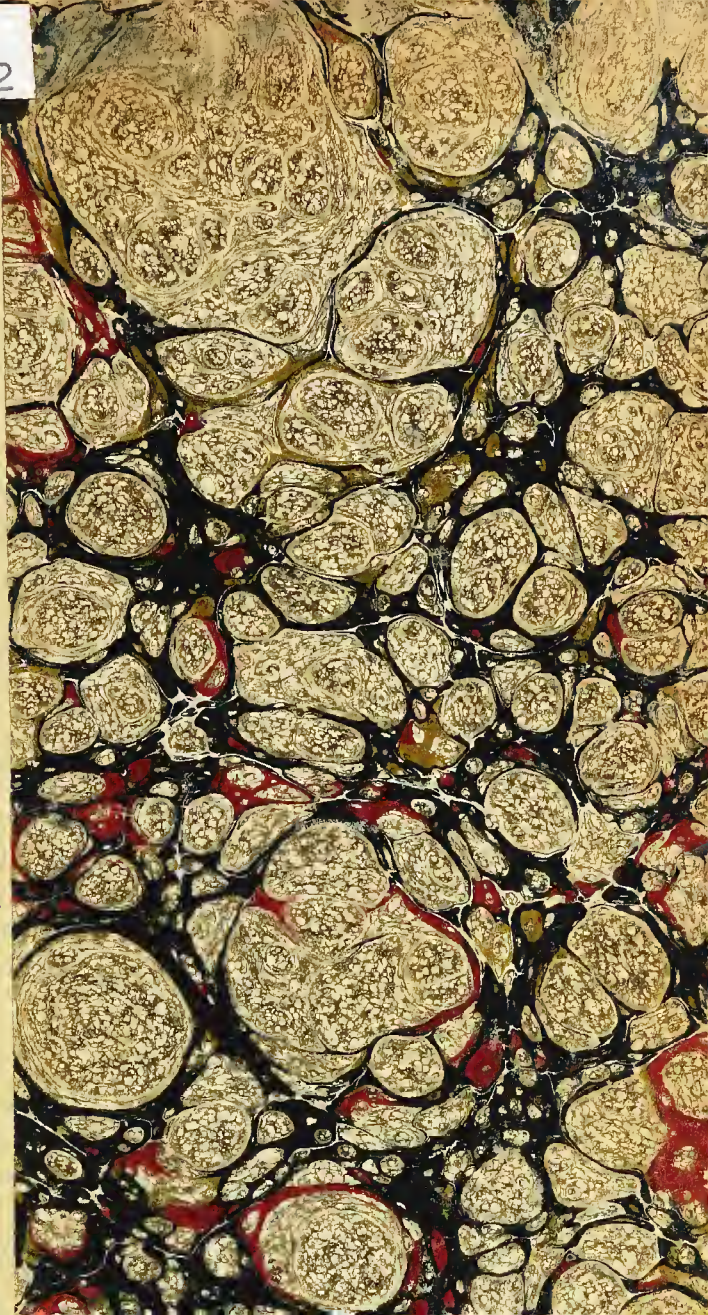


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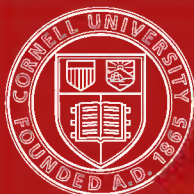
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THE CHET RAMI SECT.

Just outside the Taxali Gate, Lahore, and at a distance of only two or three hundred feet from the Royal Mosque is a small garden thickly planted with trees and flowers and trailing vines and containing a tiny square building and several faqirs' huts. The square building has one room, perhaps fourteen feet by ten, and contains certain relics of Chet Rám such as his bed and his Bible. In front of the building is a pole surmounted by a cross. Such are the monastic headquarters of the Chet Rámí Sect in Lahore.

But first a few remarks as to the sources of information. They are largely oral. Nothing has been published by the Sect, so far as I know. A few brief statements, however, have appeared in Census and Mission reports, and some material of value exists in manuscript. For the loan of manuscript material and for help in securing information I am greatly indebted to Rev. G. L. Thakur Das of the Punjab A. P. Mission and to Mr. Fazl of the Punjab Bible and Religious Book Society, Lahore. A good deal of information and all that which makes for vividness of impression has been gathered through personal intercourse with members of the Chet Rami Sect. Toward the end of December 1903, in company with Licentiate Yuhanna Khan, I visited Buchhoke, the central sanctuary of the sect. And since that time I have mingled freely with the Chet Rami faqirs in Lahore. I am especially indebted to three Chet Ramis for information, to Mor Shah, the custodian of the tomb of Chet Ram at Buchhoke, to Munshi Nathu, draftsman, the poet and theologian of the sect, and to Ghulam Mohammed, tutor, who is, so far as I know, the only member of the society who speaks English. Some account of the founder of the sect will now be given.

I.—THE MAN CHET RAM.

Chet Ram, to whom his followers give the title of *Sain i. e.*, Master, was born at Sharakpur in the Lahore District. The date of his birth is not quite certain. The Census report for 1901 puts it "in or about the year 1835." He died June 9th, 1894, at or about the age of 60. By caste Chet Ram was an *Arora* and by religion a *Vaishnavi*. The Aroras are a caste of shop-keepers and money-lenders. Chet Ram's brother and eldest son still pursue the ancestral profession at Sharakpur. Chet Ram was not an educated man. He apparently knew only *lunde*, a kind of writing used by shop-keepers. In his *Vision of Christ* he pleads his unfitness for service on account of illiteracy.

"Read I cannot, am unlearned,

Arabic and Urdu know not."

The first important experience in the line of Chet Ram was as a camp-follower in the second English war with China, which began in the time of the Mutiny and was brought to a close by the forced ratification of the Treaty of *Tientsin* in 1860. Chet Ram was twenty-one or twenty-two years old when he went to China and he remained there two or three years. It is said that he began as water carrier and was afterwards promoted to the post of steward. It is sufficient to say that he served as a menial in the Commissariat Department of the British Army in China.

On his return to India we see him next at Buchhoke, a large village ten or twelve miles from Sharakpur. Here his father-in-law, a wealthy shop-keeper lived, and here Chet Ram met his *guru* Mahbub Shah. Up to this time Chet Ram was an idolater. The following account of how Chet Ram became the disciple of Mahbub Shah was taken down from the lips of Mor Shah, the keeper of the tombs of Chet Ram and Mahbub Shah at Buchhoke:—
"Mahbub Shah was wandering hither and thither in an abstracted or intoxicated state. Chet Ram had a shop in Buchhoke for selling opium and liquor. Mahbub Shah used to come to this village from time to time; and when he passed

longer or shorter period is perfectly credible, and doubtless this is the germ out of which has grown the tradition that he slept by the bones of Mahbúb Sháh.

The Panjabi poem, of which the vision of Christ forms a section, is ascribed to Chet Rám. But it has been more or less interpolated. There is here subjoined a translation of the vision, made by Rev. G. L. Thakur Dass of Lahore :—

1. Upon the grave of Master Mahbúb Sháh
Slept Sáin Chet Ram.
2. O dear (*reader*) it was midnight,
Full moon, stars were as hanging lamps ;
3. Unique was that night surpassing the *shab qadr*,
Rays were falling from the full moon.
4. There appeared a man
Whose description is without bounds ;
5. A man came in a glorious form
Showing the face of mercy ;
6. His countenance beautiful as the full moon,
No man could look at that beauty ;
7. Glorious form, tall in stature and erect,
Appeared as if a clear mystery of the Deity.
8. Sweet was his speech, and simple his face,
Appearing entirely as the image of God.
9. Such a glory was never seen before,
The coming of the Lord Himself was recognized
in it.
10. He called aloud, " Who sleeps there ?
Awake, if thou art sleeping.
11. Thou art distinctly fortunate,
Thou art needed in the Master's presence."

12. Then answered Sàin Chet Ràm,
“ Who art thou, what is thy name ? ”
13. Then spake the mysterious divine appearance,
“ Rise come and I will tell thee, brother ? ”
14. He moved two or three steps forward,
Then turned and stood by him.
15. “ Hear these words, O Chet Ràm
Do this one thing, O *Sundar Shám*, (Epithet
of Krishna)
16. Build a Church on this very spot,
Place the Bible therein.”
17. Then answered Chet Rám,
“ I will carry out thy unique command ;
18. But I am illiterate, cannot read,
How shall I distinguish Arabic and Urdu ?
19. Then said that luminous form,
Jesus, the image of Mary ;
20. “ Place within the church a Bible,
Then shalt thou see strange things with thine eyes;
21. The learned shall come themselves,
And kiss thy feet.
22. I shall do justice in earth and heaven,
And reveal the hidden mysteries.”
23. Having said these things, the Spirit
Disappeared on that very spot.
24. Astonished there alone I stood,
As if a parrot had flown out of my hands.
25. Afterwards I began to think,
What was all this which Omnipotence did ?

26. Then my soul realized
That Jesus came to give salvation.
27. Day by day His love increased towards me,
And people came to salute me.
28. I realized that it was Jesus God
Who appeared in a bodily form."

It is pretty clear from the foregoing account that the experience described in poetical form was a *dream* or trance. Munshi Nathu, however, denies this and claims absolute objectivity for the experience. The figure described in the vision is the figure of the Glorified Christ, who draws near to the sleeper, bids him awake, and gives him the command to build a church on that very spot and place the Bible therein. If he is obedient to this command, the promise is given him that he shall see "strange things," namely the learned coming and kissing his feet. When Chet Ràm came to himself, he realized that it was "Jesus God" who had appeared in bodily form and that Jesus came to "give salvation."

There is a certain resemblance between Chet Ràm's Vision and the Vision of Saul on the way to Damascus. In both descriptions the Christ who appears is the Glorified Christ. In both there is a dialogue of question and answer, issuing in a command. But the Christ of Paul's vision rebuked the persecutor, saying "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" and he said to Ananias concerning Paul, "I will shew him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake." On the other hand, the Christ of Chet Ràm's vision does not rebuke Chet Ràm, and instead of telling him how many things, he is to suffer on behalf of the truth, tells him that "the learned will come of their own accord and kiss his feet."

It is quite likely that Mahbúb Shàh had a good deal to say to his disciple about Christ. In support of this conjecture I may cite the testimony of Licentiate Yuhanna Khan, who accompanied me to Buchhoke. He said that his father Ghulám Ghaus, formerly a Mohammedan of the Hosyarpur

District, first learned about Christ from a Mohammedan *faqir*. Facts about Christ gained from Mahbúb Shah and possibly to some extent from intercourse with Christian soldiers in the Chinese war, furnished the materials for the vision. Psychologically we must assume, I think, that, before Chet Rám had his vision, Christ had become for him an object of reflection and of profound interest. The dream or vision, or whatever it was, added just the supernatural touch which was needed to convert interest into faith. For from the date of his vision Chet Rám became, in his own way, a believer in Christ. From that day he began to gather disciples in the name of Christ. The date of Chet Rám's vision must be placed somewhere between 1860 and 1865. The interesting thing is that the Mohammedan *faqir* Mahbúb Sháh consciously or unconsciously played the part of a John the Baptist in pointing his disciple to Jesus the Christ. Thus a Hindu shop-keeper became the disciple of a Mohammedan *faqir*, and out of this fellowship between *guru* and *chela* was born a purely indigenous Christian movement in the Panjab.

The earliest account of Chet Rám known to me is found in the report of the Lahore Station of the Lodiana Mission (Panjab A. P. Mission for the year 1879, pp. 22—26. Rev. C. W. Forman, D. D., has the following things to say about "Chet Rám and his Followers": One Sabbath morning Chet Rám and some of his disciples came to my compound. One of them had been wounded by a boy for saying Christ was Lord. It was touching to see how subdued and quiet they all were, and how much they sympathized with the wounded man, whose head was still bleeding. But it was to his leader he looked chiefly for comfort, who manifested the greatest tenderness towards him. Some of his followers were formerly Hindus; and some, Muhammedans: but now they agree in acknowledging Christ as Lord and Saviour; and, so far as we can see, they look for nothing in this world for confessing him, except persecution, which they bear cheerfully."

To the foregoing account Rev. C. B. Newton appends some "Additional Statements" as follows: "Some interest having been awakened by Chet Rám and his disciples, and certain erroneous notions and exaggerations being prevalent, it may

lages on the way. At one of these, Faizpur, Chet Rám got a beating from the Muhammadan inhabitants for praising Christ. He took it meekly. At Nawán Kot a man who had long been ill came to be treated. Chet Rám tore a rag off his clothes, and gave it to the man, and told him it was given in the name of Christ, who would heal him. The sick man tied it up carefully in the corner of his turban, and went away satisfied. This was repeated on several occasions : but finally, at my suggestion, he gave up the practice of distributing rags, telling his patients that Jesus would cure them, not the rag. Several of Chet Rám's adherents visited him on the way, and he blessed them in the name of Christ. One gave him a rupee, which he made over to me at once ; this occurred on several occasions.

“At Buchhoke I remained several days with Chet Rám at his *Takyá*, hanging up my hammock under one of his trees. The church he has built is a very unpretentious structure of mud, about 6 feet by 9 inside, and 7 feet high. He had a row of tracts tacked to the wall, a handsomely bound English Bible tied up in a cloth, and suspended by a hook from the roof. This Bible he subsequently sent as a present to Sir Robert Egerton, the Lieutenant-Governor, by mail, because, as he said, he feared it might meet with harm in the midst of a hostile population, since he is himself absent wandering about the country, a great part of the time.

During my stay, I had an opportunity of observing Chet Rám's conduct and character ; and certainly the case is a remarkable one, though the good in him is so obscured by superstition and ignorance, that one can scarcely call his case a very hopeful one. He manifests on all occasions a strong feeling of love and reverence for Christ, and undergoes persecution and contumely for His name. His treatment of others is marked by a spirit of rare kindness and generosity. One day a *faqir*, a total stranger, from some distant place, came to the *takyá*, and told a story of his sufferings, having been robbed of some article of clothing. Chet Rám at once pulled off his own principal garment, and gave it to him. He never refuses appeals of this kind. A man, who was a confirmed opium eater, came one day and asked him for money,

to buy opium with. He replied that he had no money, but offered him a Korán to pawn.

“He tells his disciples that they may drink spirituous liquor, but only in moderation. He exhibits so many amiable traits that one cannot help liking him ; but on the other hand, he is ignorant, and shows no desire to learn. He likes to hear the New Testament read, (not being able to read himself,) but says that he does not need instruction from the written word having it directly from the Holy Spirit, and the Twelve Apostles. One day he told me he thought he would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and see the tomb of the Virgin Mary. I suggested that he might have some difficulty in finding it after arriving there. He replied with the utmost composure, that there could be no difficulty on this score, as the Twelve Apostles would guide him to the very spot.

“On the whole I feel that we ought by all means to look after these men and try to bring them more out into the light. Seven of them applied for baptism at the end of December, but we advised them to wait, and learn more of the Gospel, before making a public profession of faith.” So wrote Dr. C. B. Newton in 1879.

The next account of the Chet Rámís is contained in the Lodiana Mission Report for the year 1888, pp. 10, 11 : “This neighborhood (*i.e.* Raiwind, Kamas, Rajá Jhang, and Sharakpúr) has been selected for work, chiefly on account of a singular religious movement, which has been going on in it for some time. A number of years ago there was living at the village of Buchhoke a Muhammadan ‘Saint’ (at least he was cononized after his death) named Mahbúb (the beloved) ; he had disciples from all classes of the people, Hindús, Muhammadans, and even Chuhras. One of his Hindù followers was Chet Ràm.....Chet Rám has taught his followers that the Bible is the Word of God, and that Christ is a divine person. He will not admit that He is the Son of God, because he thinks that derogatory to Christ’s perfect divinity. [Not altogether correct.] It is much to be regretted that, while he has taught his followers so much valuable truth, he has not laid more stress on the Ten Com-

mandments. Some of his followers are respectable men, as the head-man of Kamas, and of Mangu Tara, but others of them seem to revel in all that is low and vile. There are about two hundred of them."

The important thing in the above-mentioned statement is the reference to *antinomian tendencies* within the sect. For some reason the officials of Government seem, at least until lately to have shared in the same view. Rev. F. H. Baring, well-known in the Punjab as the founder of the Baring High School at Batala and the donor of the building occupied by the Panjab Bible and Religious Book Society, undertook to purchase from Government a tract of about one hundred acres of land at *Rakh Madho Dás* near Sharakpúr for the purpose of colonizing the Chet Rámís at this place. In answer to this request from Mr. Baring, Lieut-Colonel J. B. Hutchinson, Commissioner, and Superintendent of the Lahore Division, cited the following testimony from the Deputy Commissioner, Lahore, dated 15th April, 1898: "The sect are Fakirs and live mainly by begging. They own about 30 head of cattle. They are extremely unpopular with the zamindars, who do not frequent their 'mela' on account of the obscenities that take place there." In order to find out the exact facts, the Deputy Commissioner secured the report of an eye-witness, who was present at one of the Chet Rámí *melas*. A letter from the Deputy Commissioner, dated 7th July, 1898, *re* the proposed settlement of the Chet Rámís, contains a reference to the proceedings at one of the Chet Rámí *melas*: "I have received a report about the last *mela* held by Chet Ram's *fakirs*. There do not seem to have been any obscenities practised there, but I otherwise agree with Mr. Meredith in thinking that the disciples of Chet Rám are most unsuitable people for colonists, and it seems extremely doubtful whether they would ever settle down to agriculture."

(Sd.) C. H. ATKINS,

Deputy Commissioner, *Lahore*.

So the colonizing scheme fell through. Of course individual members of the Chet Rámí sect may turn out to be bad men, just as individual members of any other religious society

may ; but the charge that obscene conduct is sanctioned by the practise of the Chet Ràmí sect at its public gatherings is a charge which in my opinion cannot be proved.

The next paper in order of time on the Chet Ràmí sect is an article in Urdu by Rev. Talib-ud-din, which appeared in the *Nür-Afshán*, 23rd May, 1889. It is the record of a personal interview with Chet Ràm at the home of Dr. Isà Dàs in Lahore. He was accompanied by several of his disciples, and all were apparently well under the influence of *bhang*. The talk of S. Chet Ràm, from the account given, was rather incoherent. In answer to a question concerning strong drink, he justified its use on the ground that it kept the spirit of man in equilibrium. His disciples spoke of him as if he were all in all to them, as if the very existence of God depended on his word.

There is a God, if Chet Ràm says so ;

There is no God, if Chet Ràm says no.

This statement is what gave Rev. Talib-ud-din the impression that the tendency of the Chet Ràmí sect is atheistic. It is interesting to note that the sole reference to the Chet Ràmís in the 1891 Census Report suggests the same view. Under a section (113) devoted to "Forms of Unbelief" it is written : "The followers of Chet Ràm are said to deny the existence of God." This statement is revised in the 1901 Census Report, in which we are told correctly that "the sect professes a worship of Christ."

As already stated, Chet Ràm died at Buchhoke in 1894 and there he was cremated. Munshi Nathu tells how, after the cremation of Chet Ràm, his ashes were dissolved in water and swallowed by his enthusiastic disciples. The Ràvi river soon undermined the tomb of Mahbúb Sháh. Hence his bones and the few remaining bones of Chet Ràm were transferred to another place not too near the river bank. Here they were placed in two large coffin-like boxes, which constitute the chief furniture of the present central sanctuary at Buchhoke. The spot at *Rakh Madho Dàs* which Mr. Baring tried to buy from Government, was designated by Chet Ràm

himself as the site of a future Chet Rámí town to be known as *Isapuri*. There the bones and ashes of the two leaders of the sect are to receive their final resting place.

Chet Rám appointed his daughter *Budhín Bibi* to be his successor and the head of the sect, although his eldest son *Hirá Lál* is still alive. Thus, like the Christian Science Church, the Chet Rámí sect is a sect with a female head. The woman *Budhín* is called by her followers "*Bibi Ji*" and "*Mái Ji*" out of respect. She is a nun, being pledged to life-long celibacy. She is an illiterate woman, although lately through the efforts of Mrs. Datta, Miss Bose and others she has learned to read the Panjabi character.

II.—THE DOCTRINE OF CHET RAM.

The official creed of the Chet Rámí sect reads as follows : "*Isá Ibn-i-Mariam, Ruh-ul-Quds Khuddáw and God Gaḍaria kí duhá, páth Bible wá Injíl bábat mukti wá naját.—Dastkhatt Chet Rámíán.*" Which means being translated, 'Help, O Jesus, Son of Mary, Holy Spirit, Lord God Shepherd. Read the Bible and the Gospels for salvation.—Signed by Chet Rám and the followers'. Thus the creed contains an appeal to God for help and an injunction to men to read the Bible.

There are some variations in the Chet Rámí confession of faith as seen in different places, but the substance is the same. The form of the creed here given was taken from a tablet over the door of S. Chet Ram's cell at the head-quarters of the sect in Lahore. The Chet Rámí frequently carry a long rod surmounted by a cross. The front portion of the horizontal wood of the cross is inscribed, as a rule, with the confession of faith. The creed is used practically as a kind of *mantra* or charm. Yet in the creed there is the recognition of (a) the Holy Trinity, consisting of Jesus the Son of Mary, the Holy Spirit, and God, (b) the Bible as the Word of God, and (c) salvation ('*mukti wá naját*') as mediated through the Holy Trinity and made known through the Gospel. There is a large emphasis in theory, but probably not much in practice, upon the reading (*páth*) of the Bible. I made some inquiries as to the origin of the creed. Munshi Nathu declared that it came from S. Mahbub Sháh after his death.

If this be a correct statement, we may infer that Chet Rám, after his vision of Christ, prepared this brief creed for his disciples out of the things he had heard concerning Christ from the lips of his *guru* Mahbúb Sháh.

The theology of the Chet Rámi sect is found in the Hymn of Chet Rám, a Panjábí poem containing in its original form about one hundred lines and in its interpolated form some five hundred lines. The intorpolated portions are the work of Munshi Nathu, who has already been called "the poet and theologian" of the sect. I have not worked through the whole poem. *The Vision of Christ*, which is one section of the poem, has already been given. I here subjoin a metrical version of lines 1-25, 36-43 of the original version of the poem. The metre follows the original, but the translation is without rhyme.

1. Let me celebrate God's praises
Boundless, filling earth and heaven.
2. All the world hath He created ;
Why ? that all His *name* might cherish.
3. From the Name the name was fashioned ;
From the name the Name discovered.
4. From the Name charm, spell, enchantment ;
Everywhere the name embodied.
5. From the name is known the great Name,
Who of all life is the Giver.
6. From the Name spirit-world see,
Birth and death in close succession.
7. From the Name came into being
Whatsoever God created.
8. From the Name love was begotten,
From the Name throat-cutting hatred,

9. Through God's *love* man's form was moulded,
And within was placed man's spirit.
10. Through love came the high and lowly,
Through love both to God are pleasing.
11. Through love heaven was exalted,
Through love dust of earth was favoured.
12. Through love all good things were given,
Holy men, seers, prophets, sages.
13. *Devi Devatà* were given,
Through love, also men and demons.
14. Through love see the world of spirits,
Through love Christ Himself was given.
15. Brother, whom men know as *Jesus*,
None can fully tell His greatness.
16. Christ creator and enjoyer,
In all ages omnipresent.
17. Age by age each incarnation,
Is the handiwork of Jesus.
18. All who came as men prophetic,
Jesus sent and then recalled them.
19. *Jesus know to be the true God* ;
Heavens and earth are of His splendour.
20. Know the world as God's world, brother ;
And this realm the Empress mother's.
21. This is Chetà Rám's announcement,
That all men shall be united ;
22. He who pointed out a hard path,
He who harmonized religions ;

23. He who love a heavy burden,
He who showed salvation's gateway.
24. The Death-angel's host is marching,
Cheta Rám hath freed men from it.
25. He it is who entering *Kal Yug*
Made it seem like unto *Sat Yug*.



36. Worldliness forsake, O people,
Do the service of Christ Jesus.
37. With the mouth say Jesus, Jesus ;
Read the Bible with the Gospels.
38. Build a church in every village,
Sing your songs in every village.
39. Men and women both assemble
In the church to sing God's praises.
40. Christ except there is no refuge
In this world or in the next world.
41. Jesus can the soul deliver ;
But without faith no salvation.
42. When Christ sitteth in the judgment,
None can say a word before Him.
43. Ever hold this truth with firmness,
Mary's Son is our foundation.

In the preparation of the brief account of the Chet Rámí theology now to be given, I have been greatly aided by Rev. G. L. Thakur Dás. The following sketch is based on his translation of selected portions of the Hymn and upon such information as I have been able to gather by word of mouth. The genesis of the sect has been described. A Hindú *bama* becomes the disciple of a Mohammadan *faqir*,

and out of their fellowship is produced an indigenous Christian sect. The theology of a sect having such an origin is almost bound to be a *syncretism* of various elements, some of them derived from Hindúism, some from Islám, and some from Christianity. And such we find to be the case. In this respect the Chet Rámí sect resembles the ancient Gnosticism.

The Chet Rámí sect holds a double doctrine of the Trinity. There is the Christian Trinity consisting of Jesus the Son of Mary, the Holy Spirit, and God, which is found in the Chet Rámí creed. There is also what might be called a Hindú trinity consisting of *Alláh*, *Parameshwar*, and *Khudá*, *Alláh* is the creator; *Parameshwar*, the Preserver; and *Khudá*, the Destroyer. This idea is, of course based upon the Hindú doctrine of Brahmà, Vishnu and Shiva as Creator, Preserver and Destroyer respectively. The three potencies of the universe, namely *Alláh*, *Parameshwar*, and *Khudá* have their counterpart in the human body, which from this point of view is a kind of microcosmos. There is a generative part corresponding to *Alláh*, a nourishing part (the breast) corresponding to *Parameshwar*, and a destroying part (the head) corresponding to *Khudá*. It is difficult to see how the head can be called the destroying part. I asked Munshi Nathu about it, and he replied that if you wish to destroy a man you take him by the neck. One must not look for very much consistency in these speculations.

It is through the distinctively Chet Rámí trinity represented by *Alláh*, *Parameshwar*, and *Khudá*, that the philosophy of the supremacy of Jesus is developed. Let me quote from Rev. G. L. Thákur Dàs's translation of selected portions of the Hymn: "*Alláh* is the generator of all, both good and evil. Mohammed worshipped *Alláh*, and yet he died. By worshipping *Alláh* he made a famous figure in the two worlds. He was allowed a journey to heaven, and received his share from *Alláh*, and was called the friend of *Alláh*. A Musalman is the slave of the name of one *Alláh* alone. *Parameshwar* is *Rabb*—Protector and Nourisher. Vishnu, Brahmá and Shiva boast of *Parameshwar*. *Parameshwar* is love, and loves all. The Hindús know only one *Parameshwar* and worship him alone. *Khudá* is Jesus, and He is

the Destroyer. The two names (*Alláh* and *Parameshwar*) have had their worship. Now is the time for the worship of *Khudáwand* (i.e. Christ). It is His turn now to receive adoration from the whole world. His name shall be carried over the whole earth—into every *mandir* and into every *masjid*. *Alláh* and *Parameshwar* came one after the other, but the real object is realized from one *Khudá*. From *That* (i.e. God) is *This* (i.e. Jesus), and from *This* is *That*. He shall proclaim His own name and the heaven and earth shall worship Him. Being God, He was called the servant of God, while in bodily form. Jesus is the only true *faqir*. Jesus is the true God. As such He is the Giver of all gifts. All the Mohammedan prophets and saints and the Híndú gods and incarnations were sent by Jesus. He is the Lord of the *four Yugas* and the Supreme Ruler over all. He has been authorized to enforce upon all people the worship of God. He is the Son of God. The Father and the Son are of one nature ”

“*Bap Bete dí ikko zát,
Bete bharyà nál sífat.*”

On this Mr. Thákur Dás further remarks : “ The object of this theology is to show that Jesus God is mightier than *Alláh* or *Parameshwar*. Whatever they did He can undo ; but they cannot restore what He destroys ; and He destroys and will destroy every one who does not believe and follow Him. Sickness, pestilence and death are the armies of Jesus, who as the Destroyer is also called “ the Angel of Death.” These armies He sends into the world against the unbelievers. The Chet Rámis regard themselves as the true preachers of Christ, and it is they who know the truth as it is in Jesus.”

So much for the Chet Rámi doctrine of Christ. What position do they assign to Chet Rám ? Different answers are given to this question. Munshi Nathu said : “ He is the one through whom we become acquainted with the Lord.” Another said, “ Chet Rám is not dead but is present and works now in the hearts of his followers.” Note the doctrine of the indwelling of Chet Rám. S. Mor Sháh, the custodian of the tombs at Buchhoke, in answer to the question, “ How do the Chet Rámis regard S. Chet Rám ?” replied : “ We re-

gard him as God. He is everything to us" In harmony with this Rev. G. L. Thákur Das writes: "They consider Chet Rám as Christ Himself and claim to have seen Christ in seeing Chet Rám. It is their veneration for Chet Rám's name which keeps them from joining the Christian Church. They praise Chet Rám as much as they praise Christ."

In the Chet Rámi creed there is mention of the reading of the Bible *and* the Gospels, as if they were mutually exclusive. I inquired of Munshi Nathu the reason of this. His answer was: "*Injil Rúh-ul-Quds ki marifat dí gai thí; Bible marifat bimari aur firishton ke,*" i.e., The Gospel was given through the mediun of the Holy Spirit; the Bible through the medium of disease and Angels (whatever that may mean). This is sufficient to exemplify the queer jumble of ideas which is found in the Chet Rámi theology.

III.—THE SOCIETY OF CHET RAM.

Under this head will be given whatever information has been acquired concerning the religious worship, public gatherings, methods of propagation, statistics, and future prospects of the Chet Rámi society.

Some form of baptism seems to be the rite of initiation into the sect. They distinguish between internal and external baptism. "They have, they say, received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and need not the baptism of water which is simply a human ceremony and an external rite" (Quoted from Rev. G. L. Thákur Dás.) One old *faqír* told me that there are four kinds of baptism, baptism with water, with earth, with air, and with fire. The internal or essential baptism is the baptism of the Spirit. But the baptism of the Spirit is equated with the baptism of the Word, and this is described by Munshi Nathu as follows: "When a child is born, then the creed is recited in the ears of the child, and also the names of the Twelve Disciples of Christ." Among the external forms of baptism one of the most interesting is the *earth-baptism*. It takes place whenever a lay member of the sect tears off his clothes, casts dust upon his head, and becomes a Chet Rámi monk. It is the baptism which marks

the renunciation of the world. I asked Ghulám Mohammed tutor how he was received into the Chet Rámí Church. He replied, "I was baptised by Chet Rám, who poured water on my head, and said to me 'You have been baptized with water and with fire.' He blessed me and declared me converted." It is difficult to form from these statements a consistent picture of the Chet Rámí theory and practice in the matter of baptism. Quite likely there is no settled theory or practice.

The followers of Chet Rám are divided into two classes, *monks* who are celibates and *lay-members* who are house-holders. The monks get their living by begging: the house-holders follow their own professions. The monks are the clergy of the sect. It is their business to preach the Chet Rámí gospel. It is the theory "that forty persons are always to subsist upon alms and preach the teaching of Chet Rám" (Panjab Census Report, 1901, Vol. XVII. p. 117). These are called *chelas* or disciples in the narrow sense. The Chet Rámí *faqírs*, like all *faqírs* in India, are more or less addicted to the use of intoxicating drugs, such as bhang, charas, opium, etc. Munshi Nathu defends them in this, on the ground that in the cold weather it is only through the use of stimulants that the monks can protect themselves from disease and cold. He claims that it is not a matter of self-indulgence on their part.

It is very difficult to find out the real strength of the Chet Rámí society. There is nothing in the Census reports as regards numbers, except in the 1901 Report (Vol. XVII, p. 117), where we read that "the number of Chet Rám's followers is increasing day by day." Mor Sháh said that the total number, including monks and laymen, during the life of Chet Rám, amounted to 5,000. My impression is that the number represented by 40 monks and 5,000 lay-members has become, as it were, a stereotyped and traditional number in the thought of the Chet Rámí society. Gulam Muhammad, the tutor, mentioned 15,000 as the probable numerical strength of the society at present. But this is a wild conjecture. Munshi Nathu's estimate that there are "less than one thousand Chet Rámis in the whole Panjab" may be taken as a sober statement, which is sufficiently near the truth. If we reckon

in adherents and sympathisers, the number might rise to four or five thousand. It is doubtful, if the Census Report be correct in saying that the sect is increasing day by day. I got an opposite impression from my intercourse with the Chet Rámi *faqírs*. Even Ghulám Muhammad, who clearly loves large figures, admits that there has been a "decline in number every day since Chet Rám died." Insult, persecution and want of support for the monks are assigned as the reason for the lack of growth. As Ghulám Muhammad said to me: "We wish Government protection from insult and persecution. We are persecuted by both Hindús and Mohammedans on account of following Christ. People in the city hate us. And Christians have no affection for us. There is no person now who can take the place of Chet Rám. Neither the Church nor the Government has helped us. When the *faqírs* are supported properly and have no anxiety about their food, then things will go forward. Now they have to beg from their antagonists." It is undoubtedly true that some of the Chet Rámi *faqírs*, when begging from Hindús and Mohammedans manifest a lack of straight-forwardness. Thus S. Mor Sháh admitted that "when a *faqír* begs of a Hindú, he says, 'In the name of Rám or of *Parameshwar* or of *Bhagwán*, give me something"; and in like manner, "when he begs of a Mohammedan he says, 'In the name of Alláh and Mohammed, give to me.'"

The members of the Chet Rámi community are found chiefly in the Lahore, Ferózpore, Amritsar, Gurdáspúr and Montgomery Districts. They are recruited largely from the poor classes. The great majority of them are illiterate. They come from both the Hindú and the Mohammedan communities. They are received from all castes, *churas*, *chamars*, *sansis*, etc. It appears that Chet Rám had the dream of harmonizing all religions and bringing their adherents into one fold. Caste is observed in the Chet Rámi society in the sense that each caste of converts has its food separately. Thus "Hindu converts do not mix with Mohammedan converts and caste prejudices remain untouched" (Panjab Census Report for 1901, Vol. xvii. p. 117).

There does not seem to be any fixed form of worship among the Chet Rámis. One old *faqír* declared that for the

enlightened there is no need of religious worship. "We have received," said he, "worship is for those who have not received." I invited Munshi Nathu to attend our Church services in Lahore. He proceeded to tell me that all such worship is man-made worship. I have spent many hours at the Chet Rámi *Khánqáh* in Lahore, conversing with Munshi Nathu. He said to me on one occasion, "This conversation of ours is worship : no other worship is needed." All Chet Rámis are supposed to own a Bible, and the few who can read doubtless read it. Ghulám Muhammad one day said to me: "I read the Bible every day and especially on the Sabbath. I was just reading the first chapter of John's Gospel, when you arrived." The Chet Rámi creed is repeated as an act of worship, and the Hymn of Chet Rám is chanted. There are some forms of worship which show decidedly the influence of Hinduism and Mohammedanism. At the *Khánqáh* in Lahore are preserved with great care certain relics of Chet Rám. At evening lighted lamps are placed before the Cross and the Bible. On one occasion I noticed the evening worship of two Chet Rámi women. They came and bowed themselves to the ground first before the cross and then before the Bible, and so went their way. A considerable use is made of amulets. Charms are made and inscribed with the Chet Rámi Creed and with the names of the Twelve Apostles, and hung about the neck. The treatment of the sick is peculiar. The number 5532, which represents the Creed according to the numerical value assigned to each letter of the Persian alphabet, is written on paper and tied to the arms of the sick person, or else made into a pill and swallowed. Another mode of procedure is to utter the name of God and then blow into the face of the sick.

The Central Sanctuary at Buchhoke is really a relic chamber. At a visit made to Buchhoke in December 1903, I wrote the following account: "Soon after our arrival we were taken into the *Samádh* or Mausoleum, there we saw two large wooden boxes, one of which contained the bones or ashes of S. Chet Rám and the other the bones of his *guru* Mahbúb Sháh. Within the sanctuary I saw several copies of the Gurmukhi New Testament and one complete Urdu Bible. In one corner there was something which looked like a pulpit-desk. The two coffin-like boxes were covered

with figured cloth, on which was stamped in Persian characters the Chet Rámi Creed. At evening a *chirágh* was placed in the building before the boxes, after the manner of Mohammedan saint-worship. Just at dusk two Chet Rámis arrived to attend the *mela*. They prostrated themselves before the door of the sanctuary with their faces to the ground, and repeated the prostration twice or thrice. One of them deposited an offering of a rupee on the threshold. The *central Sanctuary* of the Chet Rámi sect is a small *kachcha* building about 15 ft. square and ten feet high. It has a flat roof approached by a ladder. There are four doors, one on each of the four sides, and each only about four feet high. Each door is intended for a separate class. One is called the *faqiri* door; another, the Hindu door; the third the Christian door, and the fourth, the Mohammedan door. Perhaps this is a symbolical representation of four ways of approach to the Chet Rámi religion. In connection with the central sanctuary there seems to be a good deal of fetichism, relic-worship, bibliolatry and saint-worship."

Three *melas* a year are held at Buchhoke, one on the 18th *Pus* (about January, 1st) in memory of Mahbúb Sháh's death, the second on the 29th *Feth* (May or June) in memory of Chet Rám's death, and the third on the 18th *Sawan* (July-August) in memory of Malang Sháh, who was a friend of Mahbúb Sháh. I inquired into the way in which these *melas* are financed, and learned thereby the Chet Rámi method of *self-support*. Something is gathered by the *faqirs* of this place by begging. Some of those who attend the *melas* bring offerings of money, one giving 1/-, another 2/- another 10/-, etc. Those who live in the neighbouring villages bring flour, rice, etc. Any part of the expenses not made good from these sources of income is made up from the produce of the Chet Rámi land at Buchhoke.

I was interested to learn what different disciples of Chet Ram saw in him to attract them and to win their faith. I asked Ghulám Mohammed tutor the question: "How did you become a disciple of Chet Rám?" He answered: "I was desirous of knowing about Christ. I met Sáin Chet Rám here in the city near this place. I was about eighteen years old, when converted to the Chet Rámi faith. I saw Chet

Ràm only once before becoming his disciple. I became a converted man on the very first day. My faith in the teaching of Chet Ràm is just as strong as ever. In fact, it is increasing day by day. His was a bold and good life." Question: "What was it in Chet Ràm which impressed you?" Answer: "truth." "Was there anything in Chet Ràm's personality that attracted you?" Answer, "decorum." I asked Munshi Nathu what he saw in Chet Ràm to attract him. His answer was "love."

So much then for the diagnosis of the conditions both favourable and unfavourable, which pertain to Chet Ràm and his society. Among the things which were commendable in Chet Ràm's character were his kindness toward all men, his sincerity of purpose, and his readiness to suffer persecution for the name of Christ. These traits are found in his disciples. During my visit to Buchhoke I was deeply impressed with the simple kindness and gracious hospitality with which I was received. The Chet Rami belief that Christ is divine and that the Bible is the Word of God furnishes a unique vantage ground for the one who seek to lead them into fuller light. They allow Christians to hold services for them and with them. Any one who takes the name of Jesus can lead them in worship. They gladly welcome visits from Christians. Thus of the older Missionaries Messrs. Forman and Newton, and Mr. Bateman visited them at Buchhoke. And Mr. Baring sought to purchase for them a tract of land from Government. Many Bibles have been distributed among them. As already stated, the person of Chet Ràm tends to obtrude itself into the place of the person of Christ. But the Chet Ràmí Creed furnishes a most effective instrument against this tendency. The following questions may be asked with much effect. Whose name is in the Creed, Chet Ràm's or Christ's? Whose Cross is carried, Chet Ràm's or Christ's? Who died for the sins of the world, Chet Ràm or Christ? Only one answer is possible from them as from us.

On the other hand, it is true that there are many unfavourable symtoms in the character of Chet Ràm and in the

character of his society. He was densely ignorant and he knew it not ; and he had little or no desire for enlightenment. He claimed to know it all. Furthermore, he was given to an unwholesome use of intoxicating drugs and liquors. Christian phraseology like "the baptism of the Spirit," etc., was used with little or no conception of its real meaning. The Bible was worshipped very much as the *Granth Sâhib* is worshipped by the Sikhs. These things have descended by inheritance to his society. Hence, in spite of the points of contact between the Chet Râmi belief and the Christian belief, it is probably true that the Chet Râmi people are less open to the influence of the pure Gospel than many other communities. With them as with many others the good is the enemy of the best.

A few reflections may be appended at the close of this paper :—

(1) The Chet Râmi movement illustrates the *ferment* which is taking place on all sides in the religious thought of India. The almost daily birth of new creeds and new forms of religion is a proof that the heart of the Indian people is *unsatisfied*. Surely Augustine's sentence is applicable to India : "O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee." On all sides there is manifested a kind of blind and semi-conscious *groping and feeling after God*.

(2) The history of the Chet Râmi Church illustrates afresh the Hindi proverb, "*Faisâ guru waisâ chelâ,*" i. e., As is the master, so is the disciple. Chet Râm has passed away, but his society is stamped with his characteristics both good and bad. This fact yields an important lesson for all missionary servants of God. The law of natural fatherhood is also the law of spiritual fatherhood, namely that like propagates like. A selfish and easy-going and secularized missionary will produce a crop of converts stamped with the same characteristics as are found in himself. If we wish to see the spectacle of whole-hearted dedication to the service of Christ in the Indian Church, let us first of all dedicate

ourselves. If we long to see a spirit of prayer manifested in the Indian Church, let us remember that such a spirit of prayer will be communicated not by precept but by *example*. If we yearn to see the Spirit of God working with might in the Indian Church, let us first of all give the Spirit right of way in our own hearts and lives.

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